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LETTER DATED 26 SEPTEMBER 1990 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF INDONESIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In his statement delivered today, the Prime Minister of Portugal, His Excellency Mr. Anibal Cavaco Silva made a reference to the so-called question of East Timor. As the statement contains unwarranted misrepresentations and distortion of facts concerning East Timor, a clarification on our part is essential. However, rather than exercising our right of reply, we have opted to send the enclosed communication (see annex) so as not to impose on the valuable time of the General Assembly, which has much weightier issues to address.

I should be grateful if you could have the above-mentioned communication circulated as an official document of the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Nana S. SUTRESNA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Communication from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations

1. In the statement made on 26 September 1990 by the distinguished Prime Minister of Portugal references were made to the so-called question of East Timor. Although the thrust of the statement was, as always, designed to keep alive a non-issue that has since long lost its relevance, his misrepresentation of facts cannot go unanswered, lest this august Assembly may be led to believe that these are the prevailing realities regarding this question. It is indeed regrettable that the Prime Minister has again resorted to the same distortions as habitually practised by Portuguese spokesmen in various forums over the past 14 years. Such posturing does not add anything to the quality of our annual debate. Worse still, Portugal's unfounded allegations and insinuations do not contribute anything constructive to the ongoing efforts of the Secretary-General in finding ways to achieve an internationally acceptable, comprehensive and just solution.

2. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Portugal attempted to draw an analogy between the so-called question of East Timor and the situation in the Gulf region. To say the least, such a comparison is absurd and totally misleading. Iraq's action against Kuwait constitutes invasion, occupation and purported annexation of a sovereign and independent neighbouring State. The question of East Timor, however, concerns a non-self-governing territory in the process of decolonization, a process which, by the way, was utterly mishandled by the erstwhile colonial Power, Portugal. The pertinent facts surrounding this unfortunate question and the regrettable circumstances that caused that process to be disrupted by Portugal's irresponsible abandonment of the territory leaving behind a bloody civil war it practically instigated itself, is well-known to Member States. These facts have been exposed time and again, year after year, by my delegation. And as the annual voting.patterns on this question until 1982 in this Assembly have shown, there is now a growing understanding and support by a wide spectrum of Member States belonging to various regions.

3. Thus, far from invading and annexing another independent State, Indonesia's role in East Timor was precisely one of contributing to the process of decolonization, inter alia, by helping to ensure that, in its essence and realization, the democratically expressed will of the overwhelming majority of the East Timorese not to be overwhelmed by the armed terror and unilateral imposition of a ruthless minority, the so-called Fretilin. Incidentally, this minority group was created by Portugal, was aided and abetted by the Portuguese colonial authorities in their terrorist activities and is being kept alive even until today. It is a matter of record, therefore, that the integration of East Timor was an act of self-determination in full accordance with General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV), and in particular, principles VI, VIII and IX of resolution 1541 (XV) and as confirmed by the relevant provision of resolution 2625 (XXV).

4. The distinguished Prime Minister spoke about his country's "moral, historic and constitutional imperative" to defend the cultural and religious identity of the people of East Timor. He should know, as the rest of the world already knows, that in the rich cultural diversity of Indonesia, the East Timorese culture since its integration in the Republic has flowered and grown strong, as it never could happen during the 400 years of colonial domination. Since integration, the religion of the East Timorese, based on the Roman Catholic faith, has equally bloomed with the numbers of its adherents increasing year by year. That is why we have always been baffled by Portuguese allegations that the cultural and religious identity of the East Timorese are now somehow being violated or denigrated. The facts belie such spurious contentions and show a totally different picture. We would therefore like to ask: what does the Portuguese Prime Minister mean by the East Timorese cultural and religious identity? Is it different from that of their kith and kin across an artificial colonial boundary on the western part of the same island who speak the same language or dialects, observe the same customs and traditions, and profess the same religion? Or is it being suggested that the East Timorese cultural identity is synonymous to and rooted in the Portuguese cultural identity and language? If so, are we then to justify and accept the retention of the culture of the erstwhile metropolitan power as an unavoidable residue of past colonial bondage, and as something for which Indonesia can be held accountable if it failed to preserve it?

5. Perhaps the process of self-determination in East Timor was not as perfect as we would have wished. But neither was this the case in Portugal's former colonies elsewhere, which showed the same pattern of inept handling and irresponsible abandonment of the process of decolonization. None the less, guided by our deep and abiding commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations and as evidence of goodwill, my delegation remains prepared to co-operate with the Secretary-General and Portugal to achieve a settlement to a question which has long ceased to be an issue. For this, however, more than rhetorical misrepresentations are needed from Portugal. As an earnest of Portugal's sincerity, we would expect a more constructive attitude that would contribute to creating an atmosphere conducive to such a solution.